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DEPARTMENT FOR S/CT RHONDA SHOR, DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA, AF/E, AND
AF/RSA
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PTER ASEC ER
SUBJECT: ERITREA: 2009 COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM

REF: STATE 109980

GENERAL ASSESSMENT:

¶1. In 2009, Eritrea experienced no major act of international terrorism; however, the Eritrean government is widely regarded as being supportive of extremist activities in Somalia, particularly by providing financial and logistical support for Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam. The Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs announced in August 2007 that the USG was compiling information in consideration of putting Eritrea on the List of State Sponsors of Terrorism for its alleged support of militant extremists in Somalia, including Al-Shabaab. In July 2009, members of the UN Security Council began discussions on sanctioning Eritrea for similar allegations.

SAFE HAVEN ASSESSMENT

¶2. Post is unaware of any international terrorist group that uses Eritrea as a sanctuary/safe haven. However, the GSE has provided sanctuary to members of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS), including Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, who resided in Asmara until May 2009. The GSE has provided regional groups such as the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM), the Sudanese Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and ARS with a wide range of logistical and political support such as Eritrean passports.

The GSE professes it would know if foreign terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida were present in Eritrea. However, it has a long, porous land border with Sudan and an extensive border on the Red Sea. With limited security resources to adequately patrol these borders, Post assumes groups would be able to unofficially enter/transit through Eritrea through one of these borders without the GSE's knowledge. In addition, most of the known terrorist or insurgent incidents within the country, such as from the Afar or Kunama ethnic groups, occur in remote areas.

For instance, several websites reported on an alleged assassination attempt on President Isaias Afwerki in August of this year near Mai Atal in eastern Eritrea near Massawa. In February of the previous year, Eritrean radio and the government website reported a bus carrying 60 passengers had detonated a land mine 28 miles west of Barentu in western Eritrea, on a previously cleared road. Two Eritreans were killed and over a dozen were wounded in the blast.

TERRORIST GROUPS/ORGANIZATIONS

¶3. Until May 2009, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys resided in Asmara, receiving financial, political, and logistical support from the GSE. Members of the ARS continue to live in Asmara with the GSE's

support and full knowledge. It is believed the GSE still maintains contact with and support for Sheikh Aweys as well as his extremist organization, Hizbul Islam. While also not designated as terrorist groups, members of the OLF, ONLF, and JEM also reside and have offices in Asmara.

FOREIGN GOVERNMENT COOPERATION

¶4. The GSE has cooperated in providing overflight clearance to U.S. military aircraft engaged in regional security missions. The GSE has linked broader cooperation on counterterrorism programs to the unresolved border dispute with Ethiopia and to a resolution of the ongoing conflict in Somalia.

¶5. Point of contact is POL Ajani Husbands. IVG: 596-2314.

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